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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BUENOS AIRES 000706

SIPDIS

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PGOV, AR

SUBJECT: SUBJECT: (C) ARGENTINA: FOREIGN MINISTER "VERY
UPSET" ABOUT TIP REPORT

REF: BUENOS AIRES 0445 AND PREVIOUS

Classified By: CDA Tom Kelly for reasons 1.4 b and d

¶1. (C) Summary. On the instructions of Argentine FM Jorge Taiana, MFA Chief of Staff Alberto D'Alotto called CDA June 17 to express the GOA's irritation with the State Department's Trafficking in Persons (TIP) report which placed Argentina on the Tier 2 Watch List. D'Alotto said Taiana was "very upset" with the report's "willfully ignorant" criticism of GOA efforts to fight TIP. D'Alotto added that the "excessively critical" USG report will make it more difficult for the GOA to work with the USG to combat TIP. Although the report did not make front-page news, Argentina's two leading dailies focused on the negative aspects of the report and their headlines used the word "harsh" to describe the report.

As noted in reftels, post remains concerned that failure to recognize the GOA's notable efforts to combat TIP ultimately undermines efforts to strengthen bilateral cooperation in this important human rights and law enforcement issue. End summary.

MFA Reaction: Ranking Argentina Lower than its Neighbors is
"Objectively False"

¶2. (C) MFA Chief of Staff Alberto D'Alotto called CDA June 17 to express the GOA's irritation with the State Department's Trafficking in Persons (TIP) report which placed Argentina on the Tier 2 Watch List. D'Alotto said that he was calling on the instructions of Foreign Minister Jorge Taiana, who was in New York. D'Alotto characterized Taiana as "very upset" with Argentina's ranking on the Watch List and found it "hard to understand" such critical comments on the GOA's efforts. He said that Argentina does not deny the existence of a trafficking problem in Argentina, but to put it in a lower category than countries like Bolivia, Paraguay, Brazil, and Central American countries, he said, was "unbelievable" and "objectively false."

¶3. (C) Given that countries like Paraguay were longstanding sources of trafficked women, D'Alotto said that Taiana thought that the rankings indicated "a lack of regional understanding" of the causes and scope of the problem and a willful ignorance of GOA efforts over the last year to combat trafficking. D'Alotto added that the "excessively critical" report will complicate the efforts of those within the GOA who want to work with the USG to combat TIP here. He added that the USG, in its reliance on press reports, seemed to be punishing Argentina for its tradition of investigative journalism, which excels at uncovering problems. Countries like Bolivia and Paraguay, he asserted, do not have the same

tradition, which may be why there is an abundance of stories concerning the trafficking issue in Argentina.

¶4. (C) D'Alotto also said that more suspicious elements within the GOA will be inclined to interpret the report's release less than two weeks before Argentina's critical June 28 mid-term election as a political provocation. The CDA cautioned against the public airing of this conspiratorial thinking, pointing out that the report is always released at the same time of year and reviews TIP policies all over the world, not just in Argentina. A GOA claim of a USG "operation" against Argentina would offend Washington. D'Alotto took the point and said he did not expect that such a view would be aired.

Local Press: TIP Report "Harsh on Argentina"

¶5. (SBU) Argentina's two leading newspapers "Clarín" and "La Nación" ran stories by their Washington correspondents on June 17 with headlines that characterized the TIP report as "harsh" on Argentina (which is doubtlessly what precipitated the phone call to the CDA). Both articles carry basically accurate descriptions of the text of the report but concentrate on the negative. Although "Clarín" noted that the report recognized Argentina's efforts to fight trafficking, including passage of anti-TIP legislation and efforts to arrest suspects as well as rescue and protect victims, the article argued that "it appears the U.S. Department of State believes that the Argentine Government is only going through the motions since the report concludes that the government is unable to demonstrate 'evidence of progress.'"

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¶6. (SBU) La Nación's coverage personalized the report's findings, saying "the Barack Obama administration has placed Argentina on a 'watchlist' because it considers the country a 'source, transit, and destination for human trafficking.'" It also stated that the report "signed by Secretary Hillary Clinton" states that "the Cristina Kirchner-led government 'does not fully comply with the minimum standards for the elimination' of this embarrassing trafficking situation." Neither story ran prominently in their respective print editions: "Clarín" buried its half-page piece on page 38, and "La Nación" ran a short half-column on page 20. Its repercussions were non-existent on morning radio and TV.

¶7. (SBU) Argentina's second largest on-line news portal, Infobae.com, had the most complete coverage of the report. It explained that the report is done on an annual basis as mandated by the U.S. Congress, and that Argentina has been on Tier 2 watch list since 2006. It reported that the State Department will soon downgrade to Tier 3 those countries that remained on the watch list for two consecutive years. It noted that a Tier 3 classification could result in sanctions that could be waived by President Obama if it is deemed to be in the national interest. The article closed by quoting Secretary Clinton saying that "this is not a criticism of past failures, but a guide for future progress."

Comment: Need More Carrots, Less Stick

¶8. (C) Post considers it a top priority to work with the GOA to eliminate the scourge of TIP. Post has stressed to the Department, however, that the failure to recognize GOA efforts to combat TIP generates a backlash in the nationalistic country, making it more difficult to secure GOA commitment to work with us on this important human rights and law enforcement issue. To a certain extent, these fears are coming true. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs, as the agency charged with coordinating the GOA's official response to our annual TIP questionnaire, has been reluctant to provide this information. In the end, we received a copy directly from

the Ministry of Justice. The MFA was equally reluctant to provide similar information when we sent the Department of Labor's annual questionnaire on child labor issues. Although the Ministry of Labor assured us that they had forwarded the completed questionnaire to the MFA, it would not send us the response directly. Finally, it is our understanding that the Argentine Embassy in Washington has boycotted the Department's TIP briefing for the diplomatic community for a second year in a row.

19. (C) As noted in reftels, our critical public reports on TIP and a broad range of other issues have reinforced the view here among the Argentine public that the USG sets itself up unilaterally as police officer, judge, and jury on GOA conduct and that, however much Argentines try, their best is never good enough for us. Instead of singling out countries like Argentina for problems they are trying to address, the USG should find ways to praise governments that are genuinely trying to fight the problem, even with the limited resources available to them. Our success in moving the GOA to pass and enforce anti-TIP legislation, and to go after traffickers and rescue victims, is due in large part to our emphasis on recognizing Argentina for what it does right, while offering concrete assistance, such as law enforcement training, in areas where they fall short.

KELLY